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File**Strategic Warning Staff**

Washington, D.C. 20501

16 January 1981

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE OFFICER FOR WARNING**SUBJECT: Additional Evidence of Ethiopian and Soviet Intentions Toward Somalia**

1. Since our previous memo on Ethiopia* there has been new evidence at least partially corroborating the reports previously cited. There is no certainty, of course, that we yet have the whole story but the information is becoming almost ubiquitous, too much so to ignore. Moreover, the new evidence somewhat more strongly suggests that the Soviets are involved.

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2. Developments in Ethiopia over the past month, although not fully understood, may be evolving into a situation with potential for US-Soviet confrontation. The Mengistu regime seems to be in some danger from dissident elements in the army. [] the Ethiopian leader and others in the government feel seriously threatened, but we do not yet know whether such fears are justified. [] reports as well as recent events indicate that Mengistu has decided to play a waiting game with a dissident delegation while attempting to submerge the dissatisfaction in the military by stepping up pressure on the Somalis. In addition, [] implicate the Soviets in Mengistu's actions. []

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3. We are far from certain as to the true Soviet role in Mengistu's decisions about the matter, but they could have favored a new level of confrontation with Somalia as a diversion to give Mengistu time to track down the dissident military elements. The Soviets may even have looked favorably on Mengistu's plans to send regular Ethiopian units to attack objectives in Somalia, hoping to bring about the downfall of the Siad government and test US intentions in the area in the aftermath of the US facilities access agreement with Somalia. The Soviets might also hope that cross-border operations by regular Ethiopian troops would cause the US to respond, further damaging US-Ethiopian relations. Although it seems unlikely that the Ethiopians could mount or support an effective large scale invasion of Somalia at this time, they might try. Mengistu's decision to bring new pressure on Somalia seems certain to increase the probability of significant Ethiopian regular force incursions into Somalia. []

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4. The Soviets do not seem, however, to be preparing for any direct confrontation with the US, especially one that might involve military forces. They have only meager military capabilities in the area--the mismatched Indian Ocean Squadron and the Cuban contingent--and are not significantly

*USSR/Ethiopia: A New Challenge for Moscow, 16 December 1980

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bolstering them. Nonetheless, if [] they are encouraging Mengistu on a course of action as described above, it could lead them to a confrontation with the US. If Ethiopia invaded Somalia and the US provided some defensive assistance, the Soviets might be forced to choose between direct involvement on behalf of their client or ignoring their client's pleas for assistance. Although in the past the Soviets have tended to avoid involvement when the going got tough, it is not clear that they would do so here and risk the collapse of their footholds in the area. []

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DISCUSSION

5. The more recent reporting sheds new light on the internal Ethiopian developments outlined in our memo of 16 December 1980. Information from several independent sources seems to corroborate the earlier reports that a dissident military delegation has been in Addis Ababa since early December levying demands on the Mengistu regime. In addition to the demands for expulsion of the Soviets and Cubans and conditions that would improve the morale and welfare of the military, it now appears that the dissidents also demand that Mengistu step down. []

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6. One source indicated that Mengistu is attempting to identify the dissident leaders and eliminate them. He has been unable to do so probably because contact with them is apparently through intermediaries. His efforts may also be deterred by the size of the military delegation which may be some 80-90 men, nearly twice as many as previously reported. []

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7. According to [] report, the Soviets in Addis Ababa were "frantic" in reaction to the developments there. [] in the week following 22 December, some Soviet officers flew into Addis Ababa to meet secretly with the Ethiopian Minister of Defense Tesfaye to provide advice on steps to be taken concerning the military dissidents. []

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8. [] reports that the Ethiopian leadership is preparing actions intended to distract attention from the "threatening demands". In an effort to focus the attention of the military and civilians on defeating the Somalis and avenging Somali attacks on Ethiopia, [] Mengistu decided [] to send regular Ethiopian troops across the Somali border. Since Tesfaye Gebre-Kidane, the Defense Minister, was one of those reported to have advocated this action, the decision could have reflected advice which he received the previous week from the special Soviet military delegation. []

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Tesfaye's only reservation in supporting this course of action was that the Eastern Command had not yet completed its logistics preparations and secured its lines of communication. Although Mengistu wanted cross-border operations initiated immediately, the Defense Minister's position prevailed and no specific date for the action was decided upon. [redacted]

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9. Until the logistics preparations were complete and the rear areas secured, the Ethiopian Air Force was to continue air raids against Somalia to break the morale of the Somali military. The Somali press reported that one such raid in the Tug Der region on 5 January killed nine and injured 31 people. Another raid was conducted just inside the border northwest of Gaalkacyo on the 8th of January. [redacted]

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10. [redacted]

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[redacted] Although the Soviets evidently dissuaded the Ethiopians from cross-border operations in the Hargeisa area last summer, the sequence of events outlined above suggest that the Soviets have acquiesced in, or promoted, the recent Ethiopian decision to conduct cross-border operations against Somalia. Since the reported meetings of the high command and the Soviets, a probable Somali Salvation Front force seized and occupied Dagan, a small town southwest of Gaalkacyo and about 65 kilometers inside the Somali border. This action may indicate that Ethiopian preparations for some new cross-border operations are nearly complete. [redacted]

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Director, Strategic Warning Staff

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